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*With the reason
of the Nation*
WAR WITH MEXICO.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE NORTH CHURCH,

PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

Sept. 7, 1845,

BY RUFUS W. CLARK, A. M.
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S E R M O N .

LUKE 2 : 14.

“ On earth peace, good will toward men.”

These words are a part of the song that was sung by the angelic hosts, in presence of the shepherds, in honor of the birth of the Savior. As the pious shepherds were watching their flocks by night, suddenly a bright light surrounded them, and they were terrified by the splendor and strangeness of the scene. But soon they hear the multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Thus was Christ heralded, and every where we find him introduced by the sacred writers as the Prince of Peace. He comes to induce men to beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and no longer learn war or lift up their sword against each other. The principle of his holy religion is good will towards men—towards all men—those of our own nation and of every other nation under heaven. And to this principle it is proper that we give our attention at the present time, as the subject of war is agitated throughout our land, and we are in danger of coming in conflict with a neighboring republic. Recently some of us witnessed the departure of soldiers from this place, who, torn from their families and friends, were forced to hurry to the scene of anticipated conflict, there to encounter not only the dangers of war, but the peril of disease and a fever often fatal to those unused to the climate. They bade us farewell, knowing not but that it was their last farewell ; and that they will all return, the contingencies of war leave us little reason to expect.

It would seem as though the experience of the world, of the evils and horrors of war, was sufficient to change the tone of public opinion upon this subject, and especially, that christian nations would find some other mode of settling their difficulties than by a resort to the field of battle. And I cannot but express my surprise at the apathy that reigns among professing christians, and the silence of the pulpit and the religious press in reference to our relations to a sister republic. In former days, the danger of a war with any foreign power speedily aroused the ministers of the Prince of peace, and they publicly and fearlessly gave their views, and used their influence to expose the sins of the nation and arrest the calamities of heaven. And has the pulpit grown timid and time-serving, that her voice can no longer be heard upon questions of national interest and importance? If those who are set as watchmen upon the walls of Zion refuse to give the alarm at the approach of danger, woe to them and the cause they espouse.

It is true that in the difficulties now before our country our attention is turned towards a weak foe. If war comes, it is with a nation without resources, without discipline, without the elements of conquest; but still the principles involved in the matter are the same as though we were on the eve of a war with Great Britain or France. Besides, a war commenced with any nation however weak, will terminate, God only knows where. What human foresight can mark the contingencies and difficulties that may arise—the collisions accidental or otherwise that may take place between this and some of the nations of Europe. Let us once embark upon an enterprise of injustice and oppression, and I fear that before we were through with the business we should feel to our deep sorrow the judgments of Heaven. God would lead us in a path, from which, could we now see it, we should shrink back with dismay. True we are now strong

— prosperous and happy ; but strong, prosperous and happy republics have fallen, and they may again fall. We have within our own borders, as well as without, the elements of commotion and disaster. We have nearly 3,000,000 of slaves, who, to say the least, have no great love for their oppressors. We have some millions of Papists who would exult over the destruction of our free institutions. We have, thanks be to God, some christianity, but we have much infidelity, and many forms of error for which we deserve the chastisements of heaven.

In dwelling more at large upon our relations with Mexico, I propose to adduce in the spirit of kindness, several reasons why we should not be embroiled in a war with this people : and I would remark at the outset, that I do not think that this question is now a party question, or one on which a person should allow his party feelings to bias his judgment. It is a national question, in the discussion of which every christian, every philanthropist, and every American citizen is deeply interested. I would assail no man's honest opinions, but while I would have this and every other subject examined in the light of truth and evidence, I would also allow liberty of thought, and speech and opinion to all : and the same privilege I would claim for myself.

In the first place, a war with this people would be unjust, impolitic, and in the view of Heaven criminal. When the question of annexing a part of her territory to this country was first agitated, there was, at the north at least, but one opinion upon the subject. Remonstrances against the measure were sent on to Congress from several of the state legislatures, irrespective of party. We did not wish an extension of our territory, neither were we willing to do any thing towards extending or perpetuating slavery ; besides we were at peace with Mexico, and it was for the interest of both nations that these friendly relations should be preserv-

ed. Mexico, like ourselves, when her independence of the mother country was declared, established a republican form of government. It is true that the experiment of a free government has not been as successful with them as with us, owing to the want of general intelligence and virtue among the people.—The country has been rent by factions and convulsed by revolution after revolution, and the highest office in the state has been held by the popular military chieftain. Still the nation is deserving of our sympathies and cooperation, and for the sake of liberty and republicanism we should live in harmony with them.

Many are apt to regard the insurrection of the Texans as an honest struggle for liberty, and a parallel is instituted between this and our revolution; but whoever will take the pains to examine into the subject will discover, that the real grounds for revolt were an avaricious spirit of speculation, and a desire to establish the system of slavery in that free country. We allow that the Texans were justified in complaining to the general government, of certain grievances which they suffered, but on the other hand they were themselves chargeable with many wrongs in violating the laws under which they voluntarily lived. They were but a handful of people, while the nation consisted of 9,000,000 ; and at the breaking out of the insurrection, the Texans could number but 20,000 men, women and children. To unfold in its length and breadth the spirit of speculation which has pervaded this land, would perhaps be entering more into detail than the present occasion would demand : but the influence of slavery in producing this revolt should not be passed unnoticed. Mexico, when she threw off the Spanish yoke, gave a noble testimony in favor of free principles, by decreeing “ that no person thereafter should be born a slave or introduced as such into the Mexican states : that all slaves then held should receive stipulated wages and be subject to no punishment but

on trial and judgment by the magistrate.” Yet it is a matter of deep regret that slave holders, from our own states, did emigrate to that country carrying with them their slaves, and in direct violation of the Mexican laws, establish upon soil consecrated to freedom, this odious system. The attention of the South and West had been for some time turned to this section as a new market for slaves—as a new field for slave labor—and as furnishing them the means of greatly augmenting their political power. And in the revolt of this territory we all know how much aid was imparted by the slave holding interest of this country.—Now shall we, to bind this province to our own land, go to war with a nation, with whom we have every motive to live on terms of peace? Is it right—is it honorable—is it christian like, to grasp this country at the point of the bayonet, and make war for a province that must prove more of a curse to us than a blessing? Besides the policy of this nation is to be at peace with the world. It is in time of peace that the resources of this great nation have been developed—cities have been built—our commerce extended and the arts and sciences promoted. Peace has enabled us to extend abroad the blessings of Christianity—to send the missionary of the cross to distant nations, and promulgate the principles of liberty and virtue over the world.—And shall we at the North buckle on our armour and engage in an enterprise that must check every improvement of the age—that must throw back the cause of freedom and religion perhaps for centuries—that must make our nation a hissing and a by-word among the nations of the earth? Must we fight the battles of slavery in this free land and in this 19th century?—Shall we give our money, our prayers and our influence to send the gospel to the distant heathen, and feel no commiseration for the thousands on our own borders? What sin has Mexico committed that she should be robbed of her territory, and our naval and land forces be

all collected around her? Ah! her sin is that she is weak. Another of her crimes is that she has abolished slavery within her dominions, and we must make war upon her to force back this system upon her soil.

But if Mexico is now weak, she manifested a spirit in throwing off the dominion of Spain, which entitles her to the respect at least of those who sympathize with her free principles. "There is," says one of her historians, "no greater marvel in history, than that an empire with enervated character, oppressed, ignorant and almost destroyed, should still have had the spirit to discover and assert her rights. She in that struggle cast aside the allurements of rank, and converted her whole territory into a battle-field. She tore herself from all the fast rooted allegiances and loyalties of three centuries. She went through fifteen years of civil slaughter, and at length, alone, unaided, unsympathized with by the rest of the world, she achieved her independence.

"For the victory over such obstacles, Mexico deserves praise—nay, more, she deserves the unqualified respect of the world, and especially of that portion of it which pretends to be the fostering parent of human rights and liberty throughout the globe. It proves that she possesses a sense of right, the power of endurance, and a devotion to principle; and that with domestic peace she would assume among the nations of the earth the high place to which she is entitled."

Had Mexico possessed our Washington, or had Iturbide possessed the wisdom and virtue which characterized the father of our country, he might, when Mexico first asserted her independence of the mother country, have established a republican constitution upon a *sure* foundation. The day when he induced his soldiery to proclaim him Emperor, was a sad one for the liberties of his nation, and tho' his reign was a short one, the bias given to public feeling and opinion at that early period of their independence has ever since exerted a most destructive influence. And de

we, more fortunate than she, stand ready to throw new obstacles in her way? When already exhausted by past conflicts, and wasted and torn by internal commotion, shall we add to her distresses by waging an unjust war upon her, and letting loose the demon vampire who may suck the *last drop* of blood? Do we stand in such need of her territory for the purpose of cursing it with slavery, that we must have it though rivers of blood are made to flow?

There are considerations growing out of the nature of war, that appeal to every philanthropist and christian.

I need not remind you of the spirit that our Saviour breathed and the numerous precepts that he gave upon the duty of living peaceably with all men. "Put up thy sword into its sheath," said he, "for they that use the sword shall perish by the sword:" and oh! how fearfully has this been verified! How has the dark valley of death swarmed with the myriads that have perished in bloody strife! I need not speak of the thousands, nay, the millions that fell under a Cæsar; an Alexander; a Napoleon. I need not dwell upon the Crusades which were protracted for about 300 years, and in the first three years of which 850,000 professed christians perished by famine, pestilence and the sword. I need not refer you to Dresden and Waterloo and Borodina, at the first of which places 20,000 men fell in battle—at Waterloo 40,000, and at Borodina 80,000. These numbers are so vast that they do not make the impression upon our minds that a single murder in our streets would make. We are so familiar with the horrid statistics on this subject, that we are weary with the recital of them. Neither do the expenses of war have the influence that they ought in deterring a nation from resorting to this measure. Our last war with England, short and limited as it was, added \$120,000,000 to our public debt. The war that grew out of the French Revolution cost Great-Britain eleven hundred million of pounds sterling, and the frequent and protracted wars of Britain have burdened her with a public debt so

vast, that to pay even the interest of it draws the very life blood from her crushed population.

Look too at the criminality of war, how it feeds every vice, and corrupts the soul, and calls into exercise every base passion.—It tells a man that he may butcher his brother, whom until the day of battle he has never before seen, and from whom he has received no injury or provocation. War tells us that acts which at other times are prohibited under the name of robbery, fraud and murder, here bear different names, and an opposite moral character. It permits us to cherish hatred, hypocrisy, revenge and every malignant passion. It leads a man to forget every moral consideration, to neglect every interest and every duty, and give all his thoughts and energies to secure the destruction of his fellow creatures. He awakes in the morning to enter upon the dreadful carnage—He takes his food that his limbs may bear him to the battle field and his arm be strengthened to plunge the sword to the heart of his brother. What an employment this for beings made in God's image—beings destined for an immortal state of existence. As illustrations of the criminality of war look at the late destruction by the French soldiery of 1000 Algerines, under circumstances of the deepest cruelty. Look too at the war which was waged by England upon China and particularly at the capture of Ningpo.—“On the Chinese penetrating to the market-place in the centre of the city,” says the narrator, “they were received by a heavy fire from our troops. This sudden check so damped their ardor that their only object appeared to be to get out of the city as fast as possible : in doing which they were crowded in dense masses in the narrow streets. The artillery now coming up within a hundred yards of the crowded fugitives, poured in a most destructive fire. So awful was the destruction of human life, that the bodies were obliged to be removed to the sides of the street to allow the guns to advance : and the pursuit was followed up by the artillery and the 49th regiment for miles.” In this

massacre of flying and unresisting men 9000 Chinese were slaughtered—slaughtered by a professedly christian people, and all for gain. We have condemned the conduct of England towards China—we have condemned the course pursued by the French in Algiers—and we have justly condemned both countries in their dealings with the South Sea and Sandwich Islands ; and can our own government be sustained in provoking a war with a neighboring republic ? “ Is the time never to come,” asks a distinguished philanthropist, “when the neighborhood of a more powerful and civilized people will prove a blessing instead of a curse to an inferior community ? If ever a people were placed by Providence in a condition to do good to a neighboring State, we of this country sustain such a relation to Mexico.—That nation, inferior in science, arts, agriculture and legislation, looked to us with a generous trust. She opened her ports and territories to our farmers, mechanics and merchants. We might have conquered her by the only honorable way, by the force of superior intelligence, industry and morality. We might silently have poured in upon her our improvements : and by the infusion of our population have assimilated her to ourselves. Justice, good-will and profitable intercourse might have cemented a lasting friendship. But what is now the case ? A deadly hatred burns in Mexico towards this country. No stronger national sentiment now binds her scattered forces together than dread and detestation of Republican America. All the moral power, which we might have gained over Mexico, we have thrown away : and suspicion, dread and abhorrence, have supplanted respect and trust.” Whether these feelings break out into open hostilities or not, we have certainly provoked a war, and our course justly merits and we have reason to fear will receive the judgments of heaven.

We might, did time allow, adduce the testimony of many distinguished names against this barbarous measure. Lord Clarendon remarks—“ A whole city on fire

is a spectacle full of horror, but a whole kingdom on fire must be a prospect more terrible : and such is every kingdom in war where nothing flourishes but rapine, blood and murder. We cannot make a more lively representation and emblem to ourselves of the world of despair than by the view of a kingdom in war. War breaks all that order, interrupts all that devotion, and extinguishes all that zeal, which peace had kindled in us. It lays waste the dwelling place of God as well as of man, and introduces opinions and practices as much against heaven as against earth, and erects a Deity that desires nothing but cruelty and blood."

Washington in his correspondence remarks, "How much more delightful to an undebauched mind is the task of making improvements on the earth, than all the vain glory which can be acquired by ravaging it by the most uninterrupted career of conquests. For the sake of humanity it is devoutly to be wished, that the manly employments of agriculture, and the harmonizing effects of commerce, should supersede the waste of war, and the ravages of conquest—that swords may be turned into plough-shares, and spears into pruning-hooks, and the nations learn war no more."

But I hasten to speak particularly of the bearings of our difficulties with Mexico upon the extension and perpetuation of slavery. This point has been alluded to, but it is deserving of a moment's farther consideration. If I mistake not the views of this audience, and of the community in New England generally, we are united in the opinion that slavery is an enormous evil. We have abolished this system at the North, and if we are consistent we desire and pray for its removal from every state in the Union. Now, we all know that the great argument that has been used in favor of adding to our territory is, that the peculiar institutions of the South will thereby be strengthened. As long ago as 1829 this question was agitated and it was urged upon the community on the ground of the strength and ex-

tension it would give to the slave-holding interests.—Essays were written to show the adaptation of the soil of Texas to slave-labor and the market that would there be opened for the slave-trade. And we all know that the domestic slave trade must receive a new impulse from the accession of this territory. In many of our older slave states the soil is exhausted, and one prominent source of revenue to them is the raising and selling of slaves ; and it has been argued that in Virginia the value of slaves will be increased 50 per cent. by the annexation of Texas. Besides if this system is spread over this territory how can we assign limits to its still farther extension? What is to prevent new revolts in Mexico, and new demands being made upon us by the cupidity and avarice of the abettors of slavery? Once break down the barriers of justice, and no bounds can be set to the extension of these evils.

The foreign slave-trade will also be increased by the acquisition of territory on our southern borders. This trade, it is true, is pronounced by our laws to be felony; but let this unsettled country, with an extensive sea-coast, open a market for slaves, and appeal strongly to the avarice of wicked, unprincipled men, and how are the laws to be enforced, especially at a point so distant from the seat of government? It is well known that cargoes of slaves have been landed at Louisiana, and what is to keep them out of Texas? What is to prevent a revival of the horrid traffic in human blood? And are the citizens of New England in this enlightened, christian, benevolent age ready to go to war to augment this calamity? Are they who heretofore have always contended for liberty now prepared suddenly to change their principles, and fight the battles of slavery—fight that the slave trade may receive a new impulse—that bands of kidnappers may start out afresh and penetrate the villages of Africa and drag forth their chained and despairing victims, and after crowding them in the pestilential slave ship, consign them over to perpetual bondage?

“To perpetuate and extend slavery,” says one, “is not now, in a moral point of view, what it once was. We cannot shelter ourselves under the errors and usages of our times. We do not belong to the dark ages or to heathenism. We have not grown up under the prejudices of a blinding, crushing tyranny. We live under free institutions, and under the broad light of christianity. Every principle of our government and religion condemns slavery. The spirit of our age condemns it. The decree of a civilized world has gone out against it. In the whole circuit of civilized nations, with the single exception of the United States, not a voice is lifted up in defence of this system. All the great names in legislation and religion are against it. The most enduring reputations of our times have been won by resisting it. Recal the great names of this, and the last generation, and be they philosophers, philanthropists, poets, statesmen, jurists—all swell the reprobation of slavery. The leaders of different religious sects, join as brothers in one solemn testimony against slavery. And is this an age in which a free and christian people shall deliberately resolve to extend and perpetuate this evil? In doing so we cast ourselves off from the communion of the nations : we sink below the civilization of our age : we expose ourselves to the scorn and indignation of the world :” and these matters ought to be seriously weighed. American citizens should ask themselves the question—whether as patriots, as philanthropists, as christians, they can in any way give their influence to increase those two enormous evils—war and slavery.

I am aware that some persons may question the propriety of discussing this subject in the pulpit ; but I would ask if any one who loves his country, and values her institutions, and feels for the cause of his Redeemer, can see these evils coming upon the land, without sounding the note of alarm? Can especially, ministers of the gospel of peace, be silent, without being recreant to the high trusts committed to them? The ministry was not instituted for the ease and com-

fort of those who hold the sacred office. It was not designed that the watchmen on Zion's walls should studiously avoid subjects upon which there might happen to be a diversity of opinion in the community, while these subjects vitally affected the interest of religion. We would be the last to introduce into the sacred desk party politics, and we would also be the last to shrink from any duty which the interests of liberty and religion call upon us to discharge. We are all hastening to a higher tribunal than the opinions of our fellow mortals. Our work here below will soon be done, and O let us see to it that it is well done. If we have embraced a gospel of peace, let us abide by its principles. Let us listen to the benediction, "Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the children of God." "Follow peace with all men," says the apostle. The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. But the question arises, what can be done in the emergency in which we are placed? I reply, in the first place, we can pray; we can supplicate him who has the hearts of rulers in his hands, that he would avert from us the calamity of war and save us from the guilt of aiding in extending slavery; and if we believe in the power of prayer, here is a mighty instrumentality which we can employ for the good of our land and the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. In ancient times God conferred national blessings in answer to prayer. He was willing to save Sodom if but ten righteous men could be found in the city; and if Christians are faithful in our land, will he not arrest the judgments that are impending over it? "His arm is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that it cannot hear."

Again, We can labor to diffuse the principles of peace, and secure to our land and to the world all its attendant blessings. The sublime work of elevating

society, of extending the privileges of liberty, and blessing the world with the gospel of peace, is committed to our nation. Providence has designed us—commissioned us to benefit, not to desolate other lands; to strike off the chains from the oppressed, not to bind them on; to conquer nations not by sword and cannon, but by truth, by science, by free principles and by the power of the gospel. When we send men to the Sandwich Islands, to India, to China, we send them armed with bibles, and tracts, and the rich treasures of Christianity; but those sent to Mexico must go with instruments of death. They must go to destroy; to burn cities and slay their inhabitants, and spread desolation over the land. And all this for what? To extend and perpetuate slavery; to resist a nation struggling for its rights—its territory of which we have robbed her. And suppose these difficulties actually result, as they may in open war, and suppose that as the poor Chinese fell before the English troops, and as the Algerines are now falling before the barbarous French soldiery, suppose thus the undisciplined Mexicans fall before the American army, will heaven hold us guiltless of their blood? I tremble for my country when embarked in such an enterprise as this. I see in the future, calamities that shall convulse the nation. The testimony against war and slavery is gathering strength with every new generation, and a nation cannot perpetuate these evils without bringing upon her the judgments of an offended Sovereign. Oh let us pray that instead of the vulture with the cruel spear and arrows in his talons, hovering over our fair republic, we may descry the dove with the symbol of peace and the messages of love and good will to mankind. Let us pray that instead of the tumult of war, and the thunder of artillery, and the smoke of the battle-field, we may see the bow of promise sweeping the heavens and bearing the pledge that the earth shall never again be deluged with blood.



